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Who Likes Short-Shorts: Jokes, Genre, and Ex-Positions of "Woman"

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No doubt, just as watchmakers usually provide a particularly good movement with a similarly valuable case, so it may happen with jokes that the best achievements in the way of jokes are used as an envelope for thoughts of the greatest substance.

—Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*

A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.

—Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*

1.

The charge that the short story is a "major" form belies the fact that it continues to be studied as a "minor" genre. It is curious that in this age of theory and practice the short story remains one of the most theoretically "deterritorialized" narrative genres. Though many critics and students of the genre would vehemently protest against its "minor" or "marginal" status, it nevertheless remains a fact that, with one or two exceptions, no extensive study of the short story *as* either a narratively major or minor form is currently in print. Regardless of the reasons why such an obvious lack of critical attention to the short story exists, a review of the corpus of critical writing nev-

ertheless appears to mitigate against the popularity of the short story as a serious venue for many fiction writers. The present essay seeks to some extent to offer an explanation of the genre's "minor" status among critics while remaining one of the most "seriously playful" forms within which many current and past "major" writers create.

Though it would be impossible, in the short scope of this essay, to offer a theoretical framework for discussing the major versus minor status of the short story in general, by examining a few examples of the subgenre of the short-short story in light of Deleuze and Guattari's first qualification of a minor literature — that it bears a "high coefficient of deterritorialization" — it becomes possible to understand how the short story has managed to retain its major status among writers while at the same time remaining a critically marginal genre. Moreover, by considering the genre and its subsidiary forms in light of Freud's work on the tendentious joke as an example of a "minor" narrative genre, some light is shed not only on the narrative functions of short-short stories but also on the question of how major versus minor literary status is conferred upon a popular yet marginal form that to some extent depends on its marginal status to retain its major effect.

Deleuze and Guattari describe three characteristics of a minor literature: 1) the deterritorialization of language, 2) the connection of an individual to a political immediacy, and 3) a collective assemblage of enunciation (18). In order to adapt the concept of minor literature to a study of a genre within a major language, this essay will focus on describing and evaluating the deterritorialization of a genre: the short-short story. By deterritorialization of genre is meant the way in which a genre — in this case the short-short story — acts as a passage point into "territory" not usually seen as territory the genre usually occupies. In this case, the deterritorialization of genre signifies a space of freedom, a territory of genre wherein experiment and inversion take place in spite of the rigid controls of generic convention. Freud's work on the genre of the joke in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* will likewise be adapted to demonstrate first the similarity between the narrative operations of the joke and the short-short story, and second how these generic similarities are operative within the short-short subgenre. Short-short stories by Kafka, Petronious, Colette, and Woolf have been chosen to examine generic deterritorialization and the narrative operations shared by both short-shorts and jokes.

2.

The relationship between the short story and the joke has not gone unremarked by critics of the short story. Walter Allen, in his *The Short Story in English*, cites the joke as the present-day survivor of the oral tale and notes that "[v]ery few jokes, written down, would seem much like modern stories. They might very well, though, remind us of many of Boccacio's tales in skeleton form. This throws light on the relationship of the modern story both to the joke and to tales of earlier times" (4). Although Allen does not examine this relationship and implies that it is one in which dissimilarities dominate, at least one short-

story critic, Clare Hanson, notes that the short-story writer Saki "frequently uses the frame of the practical joke for the purpose of unmasking, revealing something hidden beneath the surface of life" (47). Hanson adds that the pleasure this unmasking yields in Saki's stories is connected to the workings of the unconscious in the same way as in the joke. According to Freud:

> A joke has quite outstandingly the characteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us "involuntarily." What happens is not that we know a moment beforehand what joke we are going to make, and that all it needs is to be clothed in words. We have an indefinable feeling, rather, which I can best compare with an "*absence*," a sudden release of intellectual tension, and then all at once the joke is there as a rule ready-clothed in words. (*Jokes* 167)

We shall return to the crucial role that "absence" plays in both the joke paradigm and the short-short, but for now it is enough to note that Hanson's use of Freud's formula constitutes the only specific correlation that has been made to date between the short story and Freud's text. Furthermore, in regard to short stories with "trick" or surprise endings (such as those written by both Saki and O. Henry), Hanson perceptively situates the reader in the position of the "listener," or necessary third person, in Freud's tendentious joke paradigm (47).

Hanson's use of Freud signals a formal recognition of the connection between the short story and the joke, but it also presents a veiled threat to the critical status of the short story. For although both Saki and O. Henry are admittedly "major" short story writers, both have been accused of being "minor" artists for having written in the highly formulaic, technically prefabricated style for which they are known. Their works have often been cited as examples of what the short-story genre can be reduced to in the hands of "sensationalists," and the beginning writer is admonished not to imitate their methods. In addition, though they are both considered to be "short-story writers," it is in the subgenre of the short-short that some of their most memorable work has been done.

Paradoxically, it is precisely because their short-short stories (O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" and Saki's "The Open Window," for example) are so closely related to the joke paradigm that their effects as stories are ensured and the writers' reputations so tarnished. Does this then mean that a study of the short-short by way of the structure of jokes will "short-circuit" at the outset, will amount only to a catalogue of the gimmickry at the writer's disposal and therefore an implicit admission that the short story is, after all, a "minor" genre?

At least two factors guard against this outcome. First, not all short-shorts are as transparently related to the joke paradigm as those of Saki and O. Henry. Second, the joke-work itself, as articulated by Freud, is not as easily appropriated as it may seem. After all, there are "good" jokes and "bad" jokes, successfully and unsuccessfully told ones. As Freud notes, *the* defining characteristic of what constitutes a joke is elusive and lies not simply in the joke technique nor in the pleasure that the joke affords its creator (*Jokes* 145). Furthermore, "the joke-work is not at everyone's command, and altogether only a few people

have a plentiful amount of it; and these are distinguished by being spoken of as having 'wit'" (140). In this regard the successful joker is not unlike the creative writer, as for both the success of their craft originates in play with words and partakes of the workings of the unconscious as it also manifests itself in the dreamwork (170). As for jokes themselves, they have a "subjective determinant" that indicates that

> [o]nly what I allow to be a joke *is* a joke. What is a joke to me may merely be a comic story to other people. But if a joke admits of this doubt, the reason can only be that it has a facade — in these instances a comic one — in the contemplation of which one person is satiated while another may try to peer behind it. A suspicion may arise, moreover, that this facade is intended to dazzle the examining eye and that these stories have therefore something to conceal.
>
> (105-6)

Furthermore, by not being at the disposal of all tellers, the joke becomes a highly deterritorialized genre, one that by its own nature is inherently removed from the language in which it is told.

What Freud suggests here is that the joke — any joke — is paradigmatic. The joke itself is an "envelope" for a thought that would otherwise not be expressed (92). In other words, "the substance of a joke is independent of the joke and is the substance of the thought, which is here, by means of a special arrangement, expressed as a joke." The "special arrangement" — the joke paradigm — involves three people: the "first person" (teller), the "second person" (object of the joke), and the "third person" (the listener). In textual terms we can revise this paradigm in any one of several ways: 1) first person/writer, second person/text, third person/reader; or 2) first person/narrator, second person/narrated, third person/narratee; or 3) first person/reader, second person text, third person/context. Each revision corresponds to and overlaps with certain theories of textual production: intentionality and reader response, textual hermeneutics, and Marxist/materialist theories of the cultural production of textual identity. By superimposing the joke paradigm we can establish a psychoanalytic criticism that can incorporate, rather than be reduced to, a diversity of critical approaches to textuality (Brooks 112).

Thus we find that at least two factors safeguard a study of the correlation between the short-short and the joke against a reductivist cataloguing of techniques: jokes themselves cannot be reduced to such a catalogue; and they possess a "subjective determinant" that implicates both creator and listener in the process of construction and deterritorializes the genre. Thus the rich potential of the joke paradigm enables us to discuss the short-short as itself a facade that "dazzles" and "conceals," a facade that the writer "exposes" and that we as readers "try to peer behind." Jokes and short-shorts, mutually reliant upon brevity and economy to achieve their effect, share Freud's requirement for *abbreviation* (*Jokes* 42).

The technique of using brevity, as Freud noted in his connection with the seminal joke borrowed from Heinrich Heine, is related to other techniques

such as condensation, multiple use of the same material, and double meaning. Freud notes that the element common to these techniques is "a question of economy" (42). But

> not every economy of expression, not every abbreviation, is on that account a joke as well. . . . There must be some peculiar kind of abbreviation and economy on which the characteristic of being a joke depends; and until we know the nature of that peculiarity our discovery of the common element in the techniques of jokes brings us no nearer to a solution of our problem. (20)

The problem Freud refers to is that of discovering the psychical process that characterizes both the production of jokes in the first person and the pleasure they produce in the listener. As regards the listener, Freud writes, "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge" (*Jokes* 147). The joke thus "lifts" the inhibitory cathexis in the listener. But the creator of the joke is barred from participating in this same psychic process if the joke is to succeed — nothing ruins a joke more readily than if the joker begins laughing in the process of telling the joke. Therefore, the psychical process the creator undergoes differs from that of the listener. In his characteristically dualistic fashion, Freud offers two explanations for the process: 1) no inhibitory cathexsis is lifted for the listener, or 2) there is an "interference" with the possibility of discharge that may arise from the application of the liberated cathectic energy to some other endopsychic use. The teller of the joke, in telling it, produces the force that lifts an inhibition by economizing a psychic expenditure of energy within the joke itself, thus clearing the way for the listener, who brings little or no psychic investment to the joke, to receive its pleasure.

Jokes, like dreams, are "overdetermined" according to Freud. Both employ the processes of displacement, condensation, and indirect representation. In both jokes and dreams, brevity results in condensation. Clearly, the literary genre of the short-short story shares with both the joke and the dream this reliance upon condensation through brevity to achieve its effect. However, short-shorts require, as do jokes, a listener actively engaged in the textual process.

Brevity, in both jokes and short-short stories, serves the purposes of communication: a joker, like a writer, must "capture" the listener in a relatively short period of time. Jokes are short both because there is not much time in which to tell them and because, owing to the nature of their dynamic, they accentuate the ephemerality of perception. Short-shorts, as imitations of the joking process, duplicate the joke's advantage of brevity and are thus aligned with the "economy of psychical expenditure" offered by the joke.

In order to trace more closely the thread weaving Freud's discussion of economy in the joke with that of economy, or brevity, in the short-short, it is helpful to subject Freud's analysis to a type of "secondary revision" by considering it in light of a story by Franz Kafka. Because the story, "Absent-Minded

Window Gazing," is so short, it is possible to reproduce it here in English translation.

Absent-Minded Window Gazing

> What are we to do with these spring days that are now fast coming on? Early this morning the sky was gray, but if you go to the window now you are surprised and lean your cheek against the latch of the casement.
>
> The sun is already setting, but down below you see it lighting up the face of the little girl who strolls along looking about her, and at the same time you see her eclipsed by the shadow of the man behind overtaking her.
>
> And then the man has passed by and the little girl's face is quite bright.
>
> (Kafka 387)

Revision of Freud's analysis here involves substituting the "first person" of the narrative for the "first person" of the joke. We will temporarily bypass the authorial position and triangulate the text into narrator, narrated, and narratee: we will make use, in other words, of our second revision of the joke paradigm. In doing this we find that the narrator is itself split into the "we" of the first line and the "you" of the end of the first paragraph. At the same time, the narratee stands outside the text, in the third-person position, as listener to a text that is simultaneously implicating the reader and constructing the reader as Other. In this way, the first revision of Freud's paradigm is superimposed onto the second.

In this superimposition, the "second person" of the joke/text is the narrated: the setting of the window, the sun setting, the girl, the man, the act of eclipsing, the brightening of the girl's face, and so on. In the second revision, the "second person" is the text, including the narrator, the narrated, and the narratee. The revisions and superimpositions can be schematized as illustrated:

JOKE/SHORT-SHORT

First Person (Teller) narrator/writer	Third Person (Listener) narratee/reader
WE/YOU	YOU/READER

Second Person
(Told)
Narrated/text

In the second paragraph of Kafka's story, the "first person" we/you conjures the inhibition that is to be lifted by putting the "third person" you/reader in

sympathy with the young girl walking in the sun. Thus when the shadow of the man eclipses her, the you/reader's inhibition against the ominousness of this act is lifted by a narrative sleight of hand — it is only his shadow that comes into contact with her face. But his threatening potential as abductor or molester is alluded to by his approach from "behind overtaking her." The last line lifts the inhibition, passing over the you/reader as the shadow passes over the girl's face; like the girl's face, the you/reader is psychically left "quite bright" as well. At the same time, because the reader as "you" is implicated in the process of constructing the joke/text, the we/you "economizes" the lifting of the inhibition by emphasizing the mutual construction of the narrative itself, thus crediting the reader with the creation of the text/joke s/he also receives.

Kafka's peculiar use of both the third-person plural and second-person universal pronoun makes the story especially well-suited to a revision of Freud's analysis. Because the pronoun chain allows the reader to participate in both the first- and third- person positions of the joke paradigm, the "economy of psychical expenditure" flows continuously through the narrative. The economic chain of the story is interrupted only by the reader's position outside the text, by her awareness of herself as being in the position of listener. Once the reader disengages from the narrative, she finds herself in the same position as that of the third person; that is, the story can now be retold and passed on to the next listener.

This story originates in a textually preconscious "thought": "spring is as fresh and vulnerable to change as a young girl alone on a street." Given over to unconscious revision, the "vulnerable to change" manifests itself as the man's shadow overtaking the girl. The season's vulnerability is displaced to the shadow's eclipse of the girl, whose brightened face restores triumph to spring's ability to overcome changing weather. The story makes use of joke techniques such as displacement, allusion, condensation and substitution. And both the we/you and the you/reader participate in the "economy of psychical expenditure" offered by the joke paradigm and set into motion by Kafka's shift in point of view from the first-person plural to the second-person "you," which can be taken as either singular or plural or both and so completes the circularity of the joke chain.

The success of the story, and the success of a joke, depends on the reader's having been "captured" by the punch line, or moment of closure. There is a marked similarity between the success of a joke as described by Freud — hidden similarities are revealed between dissimilar things, sense emerges out of nonsense, bewilderment yields to illumination — and the success of a short-short. Irving Howe agrees that in the short-short, "[e]verything depends on intensity, one sweeping blow of perception" (xi).

In the joke the liberated cathectic energy finds its release, for the listener, in laughter. Though Kafka's story is not "funny" in this sense, the release of psychical energy experienced in the moment of closure constitutes a type of Kristevan "laughter of the text" on the part of the reader. In fact, a revision of the tendentious joke paradigm in terms of what Freud calls "woman's inflexibility" (the first condition of smut according to Freud) is itself a type of "motor discharge," an expenditure that places woman simultaneously in the subject and

object position and allows her access to the joking chain as the "first person," or teller of the joke (Kristeva 224-5).

Brevity and psychical expenditure, or closure, then, are two Freudian characteristics shared by the joke and the short-short. The third quality, absence, what Freud calls a "sudden release of intellectual tension," is, in the short-short, precisely the nature of the creative condition. The writer, as Freud notes in his essay on daydreaming and creativity, must occupy a place of absence in order to create. In Kafka's story, this connection is underscored by the title itself: "Absent-Minded Window Gazing."

That short-shorts depend not only on brevity and closure but also on the presence of an absence is substantiated by the work of any number of writers. For instance, in O. Henry's story, "The Gift of the Magi," the success of the ending turns on this play between presence and absence in the "presents" the couple "present" each other with at Christmas: both gifts are purchased at the price of the very thing that the other sacrificed for. The girl sells her hair to buy the boy a watch fob; the boy sells his watch to buy a comb for the girl's hair.

In Petronius's story, "The Wife of Ephesus," the soldier attempting to seduce the wife faithfully mourning her dead husband wins his aim by cajoling her with the presentation of a meal as a substitute for the absence of her husband. Death, he declared to her, is the common end and last home of all men, enlarging on this and other commonplaces generally employed to console a wounded spirit (262). The absence of the crucified body of a criminal (which the soldier had been entrusted to guard) that was stolen while he seduced the wife is what prompts her to offer her husband's body as a substitute for the missing body of the criminal in order that the negligent soldier not be executed for failing his duty. It is this action, on the part of the wife, that effectively moves her, as woman, from the position of object, or "butt," of the seduction joke into the subject position, as a third-person listener becomes the first-person teller of her own joke. The punch line of this textual joke coincides with the moment of closure in the story:

> "The gods forbid," she cried, "I should at one and the same time look on the corpses of two men, both most dear to me. I had rather hang a dead man on the cross than kill a living one." So said, so done; she orders her husband's body to be taken from its coffin and fixed upon the vacant cross. The soldier availed himself of the ready-witted lady's expedient, and next day all men marvelled how in the world a dead man had found his way to the cross.
>
> (Petronius 265)

The wife's action, as well as her response to the seduction, has earned her the reputation as the paradigmatic "fickle woman." A revision of the story by means of the joke paradigm reveals the wife of Ephesus as the heroine of her own seduction: society would deny her, in her widowhood, any sexual satisfaction, yet she plays society's "rules" against themselves to take control of her own future. In short, within a deterritorialized genre, the wife succeeds in deterritorializing society's expectations concerning her.

3.

> Only jokes with a purpose run the risk of meeting with people who don't want to listen to them.
>
> —Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*

Tendentious jokes, according to Freud, serve an aim, and "where a joke is not an aim in itself there are only two purposes that it may serve. . . . [I]t is either a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire or defense) or an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure) (*Jokes* 97). For woman in the position of object, or "butt," of the joke, purposes of hostility and obscenity are necessarily conflated: in either case, woman is to be "kept in her place" within the scheme of male domination. Feminist critics working with Freudian texts often find that Freud himself provides the paradigm that allows woman access to the subject position in the textual/joking chain. As Jerry Aline Flieger proposes, "'she,' however offended by the male conspirators, refuses to leave the room feeling ashamed" (960).

According to Freud, it is "woman's inflexibility," her refusal to yield to man's attempts at sexual exposure, that constitutes the "first condition" for the development of the obscene joke. Thus, woman is simultaneously the inhibition underlying the joke and the source of cathectic liberation once this inhibition is lifted. In other words, in her "inflexibility" woman has access to all three positions on the joking chain. Her inflexibility is itself a superimposition of the three stages of the psychical process of the joke: 1) the inflexibility that renders woman unwilling to acknowledge herself as the butt of the joke reenacts the first-person position, in which the teller is unable to laugh at the joke in the telling of it; 2) that inflexibility is also the "absence" from which the joke arises involuntarily; and 3) inflexibility, whether a matter of attitude or of the literal stiffening of the body, is itself a "cathectic response," a "motor discharge" (albeit nonhysterical) that aligns woman with the third-person position on the joking chain, that of the listener whose inhibitions are lifted by the joke.

Moreover, in Freudian terms, "woman's incapacity to tolerate undisguised sexuality" is *nothing less* than her refusal to have exposed as *her* sexuality the pseudo-sexuality of herself as "castrated man" constructed out of man's own refusal to tolerate his homoerotic nature. The obstacle to man's desire, in other words, is not woman but man's own inhibitions regarding his homoerotic nature. Woman in the tendentious joke paradigm serves as the displaced object of man's "desire" for the company of his own, not the Other's, company. Her refusal to allow herself to be used this way (evidenced by her own cathectic response of *not* laughing at the obscene joke) is a powerful deterritorialization both of herself and of the joking chain to which she would be denied entrance.

Thus, woman, who through her refusal to participate in the joke with the same type of cathectic response as men finds access to the joking chain, becomes the Medusa who laughs, rightly, at man, who in his own homophobic fear insists that woman herself cannot be looked upon directly. The short-short story, so closely related to the paradigm of the joke, enables women writing to overdetermine themselves as subjects and to gain direct access to the power of the punch line in such a way as to "ex-pose" themselves as beyond male ridicule.

For instance, in Colette's "The Hidden Woman" ("La Femme Cache") the figure of the male doctor finds himself simultaneously exposed to woman's repressed desire and liberated by the free expression of that desire through a double-edged joke that the doctor and his wife each play on each other. Both the doctor and the wife tell each other that they won't be going to the green and purple masked ball: the doctor because he says he will be with a patient and the wife because of feigned modesty. In fact, unbeknown to each other they both attend the ball, the doctor beneath a cowl and domino, the wife dressed as Pierrot. Fascinated by the Pierrot, the doctor is startled to hear it give a cough and an "ahem" very much like that of his wife. When the Pierrot scratches "its" thigh, "with a free and uninhibited gesture," the doctor says in relief, "It's not her." In fact it is, and this is confirmed for the doctor when the Pierrot brings forth an antique snuffbox he recognizes as his wife's. Convinced that she is there for a rendezvous with another man, the doctor has his own duplicity turned back on him, and he follows the Pierrot to see whom she is meeting. In the process he is awakened to a new sense of his wife's free expression of her sexuality by the way she rolls her hips, lets men embrace her in the crowd, and even herself fondles the breasts of another woman. Finally, the doctor is sure that she is not waiting for anyone in particular but was "tasting only the monstrous pleasure of being alone, free, honest in her native brutality, of being the one who is unknown, forever solitary and without shame, whom a little mask and a hermetic costume had restored . . . to her irremediable solitude and her immodest innocence" (235-6).

The "hidden woman" of the title is both the wife the doctor knows beneath her disguise and the "brutally" free woman the disguise allows her to be. Woman's position as "object" in the doctor's joke is doubly overdetermined, and though he is startled by her mastery, he reassures himself that she will wear herself out and go home. The doctor, having knowledge of her Otherness while she remains unaware of his voyeurism, is not, in his mind, made an object in the joking chain at all.

Yet this is only one side of the double-edged joke. In fact, the end of the story, its "punch line," lifts the *doctor's* inhibitions regarding his wife's unrestrained desire and turns the reader back to the beginning of the story, to the *wife's* own lie: namely, the inhibitions she *constructs* against attending the ball alone. These inhibitions are themselves offered as a posed resistance to her husband's pretense of granting her freedom. She constructs, with her lie, a *text* of herself that the husband is willing to accept as "really" her. In fact, Irene's construction of these inhibitions effectively places her in the first-person position on the joking/textual chain. This is, then, a joke that the doctor cannot "get," for his wife ever remains the "one who is unknown" to him. As the "shameless woman" she destroys the very base from which the male-told obscene joke is constructed. Thus, the "hidden woman," the absence or blind spot in the joke paradigm, surfaces as a subject who retells the joke as one in which man's own devices for objectifying woman become the instruments of his undoing and result in his ultimate failure to "know" his woman.

Virginia Woolf's "Nurse Lugton's Curtain" (154-5) is another short-short story that "exposes" *objectified* woman as the butt of the joke and in so doing offers a revision of the joke paradigm that stresses the authority of woman's

subject position. As "Nurse," wakeful Lugton is "phallic" woman, the "ogress" in charge "with a face like the side of a mountain with great precipices and avalanches, and chasms for her eyes and hair and nose and teeth." But once asleep, the wild beasts portrayed in the fabric of the curtain she is stitching romp across her lap, the maternal site of playfulness and birth. On coming back to wakefulness and regaining her "phallic" position, she restores the carnival scene of the curtain to fixity and "normalcy." At this moment of closure, Nurse Lugton returns to her phallic position of authority as it rules by tyranny, an authority that terrifies the children in her charge and illustrates the way women are forced to use male forms of power in order to rule.

The "Otherness" and alternative view of feminine forms of power represented by Lugton's dreamworld and the fantastic lap scene coincide with Adrienne Rich's portrayal of female authority in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers." In both cases, needlework — a form of creative power traditionally allowed to women — becomes the occasion for the release of repressed desire. But Woolf's story rewrites the joke of totalizing repression to create a fanciful vision in which Nurse Lugton represents herself the repressive force that in its turn must be tamed, lulled to sleep, in order for pleasure and freedom to surface and have life.

While the joke appears to be made at the expense of Nurse Lugton, Woolf's rhetorical strategies reveal another twist on the position of woman as object in the joke paradigm. By combining the motif of the sleeping ogress with the imagery of an enchanted animal world, and by shifting from third- to second-person narration once the Nurse falls asleep and the animal kingdom comes to life, Woolf enables the reader to account for the story "logically" as the Nurse's dream. That the enchantment may be dreamt by Nurse Lugton, yet she herself may be unaware upon waking, coincides with Freud's theory of the forgetting of dreams as evidence of psychical censorship (*Interpretation* 555). Nurse Lugton's "objectified" position as the waking force of repression perhaps causes her to "forget" her natural state of emancipation, but by means of the rhetoric of the story, the reader "gets" the punch line and in so doing frees Nurse Lugton from the mantle of her own repressive authority.

Both Woolf's and Colette's short-shorts, considered in terms of the joke paradigm, can be read as "exposures" of woman, who from the position of object can achieve a subject position in the joking chain. The stories cleverly make use of the rhetorical strategies of the joke-work in order to make the *male* construct of "woman" the butt of the joke. In order for woman to achieve authority she must not only endure but also embrace the pain to which her male-defined position subjects her. This is a lesson that can be appropriated by all minorities who find themselves "butted" out of the joking/textual chain, made objects of the none-too-funny joke of cultural dominance, oppression, and imposed silence.

4.

In conclusion, a close study of the correlations between the joke and the short-short, in light both of Freud's model of the subject positions at stake in the joke and of Deleuze and Guattari's account of deterritorialization as a defining ele-

ment of minor literature, reveals similarities between the two genres that enhance and reinforce their narrative complexity. If, as Freud has said, the function of the joke is to protect words and thoughts from criticism, then perhaps the "protective coloring" of the short story as a "minor" genre is in fact part of its strength. Its status as a minor genre has thus far safeguarded it from the more voracious critical beasts roaming the narrative jungle in search of meatier game such as the novel. As a genre that, according to Georg Lukács, "sees absurdity in all its undisguised and unadorned nakedness" (51-2), the short story as a "minor" form has resisted reappropriation and reterritorialization. In this way it has managed to preserve itself as a narrative haven against the totalizing and territorializing operations required of a major literature.

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